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ABSTRACT

This study examined two research questions: (1) Is there any significant relationship between general departmental support and adoption of instructional innovations by faculty innovators at a large university? and (2) Is there any significant relationship between specific departmental support and adoption of instructional innovations by faculty innovators? The study employed a cross-sectional survey method. Subjects were all faculty members at Michigan State University who voluntarily developed and used instructional innovations in their departments. A 30-item structured questionnaire was used to gather data from 55 subjects. Pearson correlation was used to determine the relationship between general departmental support and adoption, while partial correlation was used to determine the relationship between departmental support and adoption. Findings indicate a significant relationship between general departmental support and adoption of innovations by faculty innovators. With regard to the second question, findings revealed significant relationships between office support and adoption, colleagues' support and adoption, and chairman's support and adoption. No significant relationships were found between financial support and adoption, policy support and adoption, and technical support and adoption. (GL)

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DEPARTMENTAL SUPPORT:ITS ROLE IN ADOPTION OF INSTRUCTIONAL INNOVATIONS AS PERCEIVED BY FACULTY INNOVATORS AT A LARGE UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

In settings of higher education, specially, large universities, most instructional innovations are designed, developed, and used by faculty members themselves. The Educational Development Program (EDP), Michigan State University relied on such voluntary faculty initiatives to bring about instructional innovations in various departments. In this kind of environment individual faculty member feels the need for change, decides to do something about it, and takes needed steps to introduce new ideas or objects to affect the desired change. This voluntary approach, therefore, is considerably different from the more traditional approach in which a change agent from outside the system identifies the need for change and tries to motivate the members of an organization to adopt a particular innovation to meet that need.

Faculty members who feel the need for improving their instructional processes, and actually take actions to satisfy such needs, are, in the words of Rogers and Shoemaker, called innovators; and in the words of Steiner, creative individuals. Innovators or creative individuals are a highly motivated group compared to other categories of adopters.

Innovators are considered to be adventuresome, starry-eyed, or experimenters. They deal with ideas and activities that are avant-garde, hazardous, rash or risky. They are usually able to understand complex technical ideas and products, and are not disturbed by repeated failures. They are usually young, have high social status (including education, prestige and income), rely on impersonal and cosmopolitan sources of information, exert opinion leadership, and are regarded by their peers as being deviant and unusual individuals (Rogers, 1965). Steiner's summary of findings (1965) dealing with creative individuals also highlight similar attributes of such persons. Besides the characteristics or attributes that usually mark the creative individuals as deviant, Steiner also identifies the following attributes: conceptual fluency, ability to produce a large number of ideas quickly, originality in generating unusual ideas, ability to separate source from content in evaluating information, motivated by a deep interest in the problem faced and willing to follow the problem wherever it leads. Over and above, he suspends judgment and avoids early commitments, he is less authoritarian, he accepts his own impulses and is playful and undisciplined in his explorations, he exercises independence of judgment and is not prone to conformity; and while he has a rich and even "bizarre" fantasy life, he has a superior reality orientation.

It is, therefore, quite obvious that such individuals will face great difficulty in conforming to the routine demands of educational settings. Davis, et. al., (1976) found that a number of instructional innovators at Michigan State University consciously violated the role expectations of their colleagues and played the part of "dissatisfied mavericks".

These highly motivated individuals, however, do not innovate and adopt new ideas or products without being affected by the innovation and the organization or system in which they operate. A number of studies have focused on different aspects of individual, innovation and organizational variables which play significant roles in innovation-adoption processes. Researchers (Miles, 1964; Diamond et. al., 1975 and Davis, 1979) have also emphasized the importance of departmental support for innovations and continued use of these innovations.

This study, therefore, has attempted to find out whether departmental support plays a significant role in instructional innovations, created and adopted by faculty innovators in large universities. It should be noted that in large universities faculty members have relatively more autonomy to decide on the content of their courses, and how they should be taught, so long as the courses conform to the descriptions, and the resources are at hand (Davis, et. al., 1980).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to investigate this problem, the study has attempted to answer the following research questions:

(1) Is there any significant relationship between general departmental support and adoption (building and use) of instructional innovations by faculty innovators at a large university?

(2) Is there any significant relationship between specific departmental supports and adoption of instructional innovations by faculty innovators?

For greater understanding basic terms and expressions used in this study are defined and described below:

General Departmental Support refers to resources of an academic department that can be used in building and use of instructional innovations.

Specific Departmental Supports are financial, policy, technical, office, colleagues' and chairman's support.

Instructional Innovations refer to projects designed, developed and used for the purpose of improving teaching-learning processes in different departments at Michigan State University.

Faculty Innovators are those faculty members who took voluntary initiatives to develop and use EDP instructional projects to improve their instructional processes in different departments of Michigan State University.

Adoption refers to the actual building and use of instructional innovations by faculty innovators.

METHODOLOGY

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The study employed a cross-sectional survey method. The population for the study consisted of all faculty members (also called project directors), who developed and used, on a voluntary basis, instructional innovations in their departments at Michigan State University. In order to include only one director from each project, the following criteria were followed:

(1) The project director must be a faculty member in an academic department at Michigan State University with teaching as the primary responsibility.

(2) Efforts were made to include the major project director from each project in the sampling frame. If the major project director was not available, then the next faculty project director was included, and so on.

During the period under study, a total of 180 instructional projects were reported. Out of these 180 projects, 50 were excluded (because they were either continuations of previous projects, or they had directors involved in more than one project at a time), before a sample of 65 projects was drawn by using random sampling technique.

DATA COLLECTION

To collect the data from the respondents a structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale was designed, developed and validated. A total of thirty statements were used on the questionnaire to collect respondents' perceptions with regard to departmental support and adoption of instructional innovations. The respondents were asked to indicate the degree of their agreement or disagreement with the questionnaire statements. Numerical weights were assigned to each of 5-response categories in a way that the higher the score, the greater the degree of agreement or disagreement.

The questionnaires were mailed to the respondents with cover letters assuring the maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity. A three-week period was allowed for the return of the

completed questionnaires. Through telephone calls, one more attempt was made to collect data from those who failed to return the completed questionnaires in the first place. A total of 55 completed questionnaires were received; the rate of return being 84 percent.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed by the computer using SPSSX. The statistical techniques used were Pearson correlation and partial correlation. To find out the relationship between general departmental support and adoption Pearson correlation was used, while partial correlation analysis was employed to determine the relationship of each specific departmental support with adoption controlling other types of departmental support. For example, the relationship between financial support and adoption was measured by controlling other independent variables, namely, policy, technical, office, colleagues' and chairman's support, and so on.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study indicate a significant relationship ($r = .4609$, $p < 0.05$) between general departmental support and adoption of instructional innovations by faculty innovators.

With regard to the relationship between specfic departmental supports and adoption, the findings revealed significant relationships between office support and adoption, colleagues' support and adoption, and chairman's support and adoption. No significant relationships were reported between financial support and adoption, policy support and adoption, and technical support and adoption. The table below contains the data.

Relationship between specific departmental supports and adoption
(n=55)

Specific support	Partial r	P
Financial support	.0173	.452
Policy support	-.2812	.024
Technical support	-.1542	.143
Office support	.4905*	.000
Colleagues' support	.3247*	.011
Chairman's support	.2865*	.022

* Significant at .05 level.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A significant relationship between general departmental support and adoption suggests that the respondents perceived a positive role of departmental support in relation to adoption of innovations. Departmental support or resources, therefore, can be profitably used to manipulate the innovation-adoption behaviors of faculty innovators in large universities.

To further examine the relationship between independent and dependent variables, departmental support was divided into six types of support, namely, financial, policy, technical, office, colleagues' and chairman's support. The respondents perceived office, colleagues' and chairman's support as important factors in relation to their innovation-adoption behaviors. It is interesting to note that the respondents did not perceive a significant relationship between financial support and their adoption behaviors. Some of the possible reasons for this, may be, due to the amount of funds needed, not easily available funds, and the personality characteristics of the respondents. If an innovation requires a small dollar investment, it is likely that the adopter, who is highly motivated to bring about a change, may not perceive the need for such funds as being important. Policy support was also not perceived significant by the respondents. Considering the personality traits of innovators and the extent of autonomy faculty members enjoy in respect of their teaching in large universities, it can be said that they will not consider policy support as an important factor in relation to their adoption bahaviors as long as instructional innovations do not affect others in the organization or the organization itself. Since innovators are experimenters, risk-takers and quick to grasp complex and technical ideas and products, it is no wonder why they will perceive technical support as an important factor influencing their willingness to design, develop and use instructional innovations.

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